A literary historian: Eusebius of Caesarea and the martyrs of Lyons and Palestine

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CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

THE FOURTH-CENTURY DEBATES

A Literary Historian: Eusebius of Caesarea and the Martyrs of Lyons and Palestine[1]

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Abstract

This paper seeks to re-ignite discussion about two sets of martyr stories in early Christian literature, one perhaps overly treasured, the other somewhat neglected. It identifies a number of striking similarities between *The Letter of the Churches in Lyons and Vienne to the Church in Smyrna,* preserved in Book V of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, and *The Martyrs of Palestine*, written by Eusebius himself. I will demonstrate not just the presence of these literary echoes, but also the strong likelihood that Eusebius himself was aware of them and may be responsible for them. Given the difficulties of dating surrounding both texts, and therefore the impossibility of definitively assigning the direction of dependency, this paper suggests first that both sources should be used with caution for historical reconstruction. Second, and more interesting, it asks what these similarities reveal about Eusebius' own attitude to early Christian martyrdom. I suggest that the parallels in his writings between the descriptions of these martyrs, ostensibly killed one hundred and thirty years apart on opposite sides of the Mediterranean, reveals that Eusebius' interest is in the continuity of the Christian community's behaviour in the face of 'persecution'. The similarities between the two sets of stories can tentatively be ascribed to Eusebius' desire that the Christian community appear homogenous throughout its history.

I. Early Christian martyrdoms in Lyons and Caesarea

I begin by noting an eye-catching similarity between the treatment of two martyred Christians by the Roman authorities, one in *The Letter of the Churches in Lyons and Vienne to the Church in Smyrna* (hereafter referred to as *The Martyrs of Lyons*) and one in *The Martyrs of Palestine*. In 177 AD, a man from Pergamum called Attalus was martyred in the western town of Lyons.[2] His final

[1] I am hugely grateful to the audience at the Oxford Patristics Conference, August 2011, especially Mark Edwards, Aaron Johnson, Winrich Löhr and Candida Moss, for their questions and comments, to David DeVore and Riccardo Bof, who read this paper and made many helpful suggestions, and especially to Kate Cooper, who enabled, encouraged and inspired my doctoral project, of which this article is an offshoot.

[2] The date of events is unclear; see *e.g.* Timothy Barnes, 'Eusebius and the Date of the Martyrdoms', in Robert Turcan and Jean Rouge (eds), *Les Martyrs de Lyon (177) / Colloque international du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Lyon, 20-23 septembre 1977* (Paris, 1978), 137-41.

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moments are recorded in *The Martyrs of Lyons*, a document cherished by generations of scholars as supposedly the earliest record of Christianity in the west. The letter is anonymous, apparently sent from these western Christian communities to the eastern one in the aftermath of the events described. It reports that Attalus was a stalwart of the Christian community in Pergamum (*EH* V 1.17) but well-known also in Lyons (*EH* V 1.43). We are told that a crowd gathered in the arena called for him to be brought before them.[3] Attalus is duly produced, described in the letter as 'a ready combatant by reason of his good conscience' (ἕτοιμος … ἀγωνιστὴς διὰ τὸ εὐσυνείδητον), 'truly exercised in the Christian discipline' (γνησίως ἐν τῇ Χριστιανῇ συντάξει γεγυμνασμένος), and 'always a witness among us of truth' (ἀεὶ μάρτυς ἐγεγόνει παρ' ἡμῖν ἀληθείας, *EH* V 1.43).[4] The letter tells how 'he was conducted round the amphitheatre, preceded by a board, on which was written in Latin "This is Attalus the Christian"' (καὶ περιαχθεὶς κύκλῳ τοῦ ἀμφιθεάτρου, πίνακος αὐτὸν προάγοντος ἐν ᾧ ἐγέγραπτο Ῥωμαϊστί· οὗτός ἐστιν Ἄτταλος ὁ Χριστιανός, *EH* V 1.44). Though reprieved on this occasion, Attalus is tortured and thrown to the beasts in the arena later in the account (*EH* V 1.53).

Exactly one hundred and thirty years later, one thousand eight hundred miles away in Caesarea in Palestine, an unrelated Christian, Agapius of Gaza, also died at the hands of the Romans, according to another Christian document, Eusebius of Caesarea's *The Martyrs of Palestine*. This account of the effects of Diocletian's 'Great Persecution' in the author's homeland records how Agapius was thrown to wild animals in the arena at Caesarea in celebration of the emperor Maximin's birthday. Agapius is described as 'a man distinguished for sobriety and forbearance of conduct' (*MPal* LR 6.3).[5] We are told that he too was paraded around the arena preceded by a sign. His guards 'brought him round in mockery in the midst of the arena; and a tablet with an inscription went before him, which bore no token of reproach save that he was a Christian' (*MPal* LR 6.4). These references to the identifying signs may well be echoes

[3] There is some debate over whether the martyrs in the arena were sacrificial victims or not. See *e.g.* James H. Oliver and Robert E.A. Palmer, 'Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate', *Hesperia* 24 (1955), 320-49; Timothy Barnes, 'Legislation against Christians', *JRS* 58 (1968), 44; *id.*, 'Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum', *JTS* n.s. 19 (1968), 518-9; Walter O. Moeller, 'The Trinci/Trinqui and the Martyrs of Lyons', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 2 (1972), 127.

[4] Translations taken from: Hugh Lawlor and John Oulton, *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, vol. 1 (New York and Toronto, 1927); Greek text taken from: Gustave Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée. Histoire ecclésiastique*, 3 vols., SC 31, 41, 55 (Paris, 1952-1958; [vol. 3 repr. 1967]); http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/.

[5] No Greek text for this passage is extant. The long recension of *The Martyrs of Palestine*, from which this is taken, survives only in fragmentary form in the original Greek, but in full in a Syriac translation from which this story is taken. The short recension of the text, which does survive in full in the original Greek, does not contain this detail, a point I suggest is of significance and which I will discuss lower down in the main text.

of the sign identifying Jesus as the 'King of the Jews' in the gospels;[6] *imitatio Christi* was a common motif in early Christian martyr literature.[7] Significantly though, no early Christian martyrs are ever said to be labelled with a sign other than Attalus, Agapius and Jesus himself. The parallel is therefore striking, especially given the close similarity of the wording on the signs in Gaul and Caesarea.[8] This prompts us to look more closely at these two texts.

A closer reading reveals other tantalising similarities. One of Attalus' companions, a deacon of the church in Vienne called Sanctus (*EH* V 1.17), when questioned by the Roman governor in Lyons, refuses to answer all questions asked of him. Again, this is reminiscent of Christ's behaviour in the gospel narratives. But the question and its reply are stylised, and demand comparison with the story of Apphianus, a young man from Lycia tortured and killed by the Roman governor Urbanus in *The Martyrs of Palestine*. In *The Martyrs of Lyons*, Sanctus when questioned, 'would not state even his own name, or the people or city whence he came, or whether he were bond or free. But to every question he replied in Latin: "I am a Christian"' (μήτε τὸ ἴδιον κατειπεῖν ὄνομα μήτε ἔθνους μήτε πόλεως ὅθεν ἦν, μήτε εἰ δοῦλος ἢ ἐλεύθερος εἴη· ἀλλὰ πρὸς πάντα τὰ ἐπερωτώμενα ἀπεκρίνατο τῇ Ῥωμαϊκῇ φωνῇ «Χριστιανός εἰμι», *EH* V 1.20). In *The Martyrs of Palestine*, Apphianus too 'made no further confession than that he was a Christian; and when he next asked who he was, whence he came, and where he was staying, he confessed nothing, except that he was a slave of Christ' (<οὐδὲν> πλεῖον ἢ Χριστιανὸν ἑαυτὸν ὡμολόγει εἶναι, εἶτα ἐρωτώμενος ὅστις εἴη καὶ πόθεν, ποῖ τε εἴη μένων, οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ Χριστοῦ δοῦλον ἑαυτὸν ὡμολόγει, *MPal* LR 4.12). Though not identical, nevertheless the series of questions concerning identity and provenance, as well as the echoed language of slavery in these two texts describing events many miles and years apart, are eerily similar.

The double manner in which the refusal is recorded is also paralleled. In the account of Sanctus' suffering in Lyons, the author repeats his point: 'This he confessed again and again, instead of name and city and race and all else, and

[6] See *Mark* 15:26; *Matth.* 27:37; *Luke* 23:38; *John* 19:20.

[7] *The Martyrs of Palestine* comments explicitly on the similarity of Agapius' death to that of Jesus, noting that he was also killed alongside a common criminal, and that 'very similar was this passion to the Passion of our Saviour…' (*MPal* LR 6.5). See Candida Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford and New York, 2010), 47, 62, 68 and 85 on *imitatio Christi* in *The Martyrs of Lyons*; 62 and 71 on Eusebius' use of it, though not mentioning the examples noted here. In her second book, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven and London, 2012), 105, Moss notes the echo of the phrase 'worthy of undying remembrance' between *The Martyrs of Lyons* (V 1.1), *The Martyrs of Palestine* (2.28), and *EH* III 5.4.

[8] Paul L. Maier, 'The Inscription on the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth', *Hermes* 124 (1996), 59-61, notes that such signs were common Roman practice, and that there is no reason to doubt their historicity. He also notes, however, the paucity of literary references to them. I owe this reference to David DeVore.

no other word did the heathen hear from his lips' (τοῦτο καὶ ἀντὶ ὀνόματος καὶ ἀντὶ πόλεως καὶ ἀντὶ γένους καὶ ἀντὶ παντὸς ἐπαλλήλως ὡμολόγει, ἄλλην δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔθνη). Similarly, the story about Apphianus asserts for a second time that when his torturers 'endeavoured to force him to say who he was, whence he came, and where he was staying' (λέγειν ἐξεβιάζοντο ὅστις εἴη καὶ πόθεν καὶ ποῖ εἴη μένων, *MPal* LR 4.13), he 'did not even count them worthy of a reply, except that to their questions he made use of but one utterance – a confession of Christ and a testimony that he knew His Father as God alone' (ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἀποκρίσεως αὐτοὺς καταξιῶν, πρὸς τὰς πεύσεις μιᾷ μόνῃ ἐκέχρητο φωνῇ τὸν Χριστὸν ὁμολογούσῃ καὶ τὸν τούτου πατέρα μόνον εἰδέναι μαρτυρούσῃ θεόν). The twin assertion of the refusal in both texts is striking.

In the respective responses of the Roman governors there is a further parallel between the two stories. In Lyons, the governor and his lackeys respond to Sanctus' refusal to answer their questions with further tortures, eventually applying 'red-hot brazen plates to the most tender parts of his body' (χαλκᾶς λεπίδας διὰ πύρους προσεκόλλων τοῖς τρυφερωτάτοις μέλεσι τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, *EH* V 1.21). In Apphianus' case, the governor's rage is so great that he too resorts to fire; he orders his men to 'swathe his feet in linen cloths soaked in oil and set them on fire' (λίνοις ἐλαίῳ δευθεῖσιν τοὺς πόδας περιπλέξαντας αὐτοῦ πῦρ ὑφάψαι, *MPal* LR 4.12). In both cases the refusal sparks more torture, and in both cases the authorities turn to fire in their desperation.

One further parallel is worth noting, in the effects of these tortures upon the victims. Sanctus is so deformed by his injuries that his body is described as 'one whole wound and bruise, contracted, having lost the outward form of a man…' (ὅλον τραῦμα καὶ μώλωψ καὶ συνεσπασμένον καὶ ἀποβεβληκὸς τὴν ἀνθρώπειον ἔξωθεν μορφήν, *EH* V 1.23). Apphianus too had earlier been whipped so badly that 'his face was disfigured and it was no longer possible <even for his friends> to recognise who he was' (ὡς μηκέθ', ὅστις εἴη, τὸ πρόσωπον ἀφανισθέντα, γινώσκεσθαι, *MPal* LR 4.11). After his fiery tortures he is described as follows: 'His sides so rent, his whole body so swollen, and the fashion of his face altered' (οὕτω μὲν τὰς πλευρὰς διερρωγώς, οὕτω δὲ διωγκηκὼς καὶ τοῦ προσώπου τὴν μορφὴν ἠλλοιωμένος, *MPal* LR 4.12). The experiences of Sanctus and Apphianus closely resemble each other: the terms in which they refuse to cooperate, their fiery torments, and the eventual result where they are so battered as to be unrecognisable. The linguistic parallels are occasional, but the structural and thematic parallels are ronounced.

Numerous other parallels and echoes are revealed when these two texts are read together, though the size of this paper prevents detailed analysis of them all. Two other points are worth mentioning. Both narratives describe extremely angry and violent reactions from the Roman authorities. This is not a common feature of early Christian martyr *acta*, but in both these texts the representatives

of Roman authority are described as angry, even bestial, and as caring nothing for the age or situation of their victims.[9] Similarly there is an emphasis in both texts on the mutual encouragement of the martyrs, both among themselves and with their wider communities.[10] Both texts are frequently punctuated by comments on this quality, and I will return to this point. All these similarities taken together encourage us to examine the transmission of these two texts more closely.

II. Coincidence or design?

It is of course possible that these surprising similarities are simply coincidences of historical circumstance. But a number of factors might make us hesitate to so dismiss them. The first is the transmission of the two accounts. *The Martyrs of Lyons* is anonymous and undated, and is transmitted only in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*, who was also the author of the other text under discussion here, *The Martyrs of Palestine*. Eusebius, the self-proclaimed first church historian, writing both the *Ecclesiastical History* and *The Martyrs of Palestine* in the early 4th century, connects these two accounts otherwise separated by a gulf in time and space. Indeed, as we shall see, at one point a version of *The Martyrs of Lyons* formed part of the *Ecclesiastical History*. This Eusebian link demands that we pay heed to what might otherwise seem coincidental.

Close inspection of the editions of and relationships between the two texts suggests strongly that these similarities are not coincidental. *The Martyrs of Palestine* is extant in two recensions, a longer and shorter (the longer survives in Greek only in fragments, in some fragments of a later Latin translation and in a complete Syriac translation; the shorter is extant in the original Greek).[11]

[9] See *e.g. EH* V 1.10; V 1.29-31; V 1.50; V 1.53-4; V 1.57-8; *MPal* LR 4.10-2; 7.1-2; 11.16; 11.24. See further on this point, Jill Harries 'Constructing the Judge: Judicial accountability and the culture of criticism in late antiquity', in Richard Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identity in Late Antiquity* (London and New York, 1999), 214-33, and James Corke-Webster, 'Author and Authority: Literary Representations of Moral Authority in Eusebius of Caesarea's *The Martyrs of Palestine*', in Peter Gemeinhardt and Johan Leemans (eds), *Martyrdom in Late Antiquity (300-400 AD): History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity* (Berlin and New York, 2012), 51-78.

[10] See *e.g. EH* V 1.6; V 1.28; V 1.41; V 1.42; V 1.46; V 1.49; V 1.54; V 2.6-7; *MPal* 3.4, 7.1, 8.5-8, 8.9-10, 9.4-5, 10.1, 11.2, 11.22, 11.25-6, 11.29. See again J. Corke-Webster, 'Author and Authority' (2012).

[11] For details see H. Lawlor and J.Oulton, *Eusebius,* vol. 2, 46-50. The Greek fragments were discovered and published in Hippolyte Delehaye, '*Eusebii Caesariensis De Martyribus Palaestinae Longioris Libelli Fragmenta*', *AnBoll* 16 (1897), 113-39; the Syriac version, partially available in Stephen Assemani, *Acta Sanctorum martyrum orientalium et occidentalium* (Rome, 1748) was published in full in William Cureton, *History of the Martyrs in Palestine, by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, Discovered in a Very Antient* (sic) *Manuscript* (London and Edinburgh, 1861).

The shorter contains largely the same anecdotes as the longer but in less detail.[12] There has been extensive debate over the sequence and dating of the two recensions, connected to the debates over the editions and dating of the *Ecclesiastical History*. Most scholars now follow the conclusions of Richard Burgess' seminal 1997 article.[13] On this theory, the long recension was completed almost immediately the persecution in Palestine ceased (temporarily) in April 311 following the Edict of Toleration. Eusebius then abbreviated it to produce a short recension (numerous textual issues indicate that the short recension was an abridgement of the long) which formed part of the first edition of the *Ecclesiastical History*, produced in 313/314. When Eusebius issued a second edition of the *Ecclesiastical History* in 315/316 he replaced the short recension with the current Book VIII.[14] At this point the long recension was lightly edited and issued in a second edition.[15]

It is striking that the literary similarities detailed above between the Lyons and Caesarean martyrs are found only in the long recension, not in the short. In the case of Agapius, though many details are identical between the two recensions, the inscribed tablet identifying him as a Christian has disappeared in the short. With Apphianus too, in the short recension there is no trace of the repeated threefold questioning or the refusal to respond with anything other than a declaration of Christianity.[16] Given that the short recension was almost certainly written after the long, this absence is hardly coincidental. It seems that

[12] The short recension is included in most but not all of the extant manuscripts of the *Ecclesiastical History*. In some it is found at the close of Book X, in one in the middle of Book VIII starting at chapter 13, and in the majority between Books VIII and IX. However, it is not included in the Syriac or Rufinus' translations of the *Ecclesiastical History*.

[13] Richard Burgess, 'The Dates and Editions of Eusebius' *Chronici Canones* and *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *JTS* n.s. 48 (1997), 502. The literature on this topic is extensive; other key contributions include: H. Lawlor and J. Oulton, *Eusebius,* vol. 2, 1-11; Timothy Barnes, 'The Editions of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*', *GRBS* 21 (1980), 191-201; *id*., *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1981), 148-50, 154-8; *id*., 'Some Inconsistencies in Eusebius', *JTS* n.s. 35 (1984), 470-5; Andrew Louth, 'The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *JTS* n.s. 41 (1990), 111-23. See also the excellent timeline, which follows Burgess' suggestions, in Andrew J. Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 37-41.

[14] That the short recension was once where Book VIII stands now was a suggestion popularised by Timothy Barnes; see *id*., 'Some Inconsistencies' (1984), 470-1; building on Joseph Lightfoot, 'Eusebius of Caesarea', in William Smith and Henry Wace (eds), *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol. 2 (London, 1880), 319-21, and H. Lawlor and J. Oulton, *Eusebius* II (1927), 7-9.

[15] The only significant problem with this theory is a passing phrase in the 315/316 second edition of the *Ecclesiastical History*, where Eusebius indicates that he intends to produce his account of the Caesarean martyrs in the future (*EH* VIII 13.7). Burgess solves this by suggesting that Eusebius failed to publish the initial long recension before the persecution in Palestine began again in November 311, and when persecution finally ceased in summer 313 (following the Edict of Milan), he had already decided to incorporate a shorter version into the *Ecclesiastical History*. The long recension was thus only needed again after the short recension had been replaced by the current Book VIII in 315/316, hence its eventual publication at this point.

[16] The comment on Apphianus' battered state is present in the short recension.

when producing the short recension, originally intended to stand as Book VIII of the *Ecclesiastical History*, and thus to be read together with the account of the martyrs in Lyons in Book V, Eusebius removed from *The Martyrs of Palestine* those elements that echoed that earlier story, since he had produced the *Ecclesiastical History* after writing the long recension of *The Martyrs of Palestine*. Eusebius' awareness of these literary parallels and his apparent attempt to hide them from the reader who would have both stories in front of him (remembering that the long recension was probably originally intended as a standalone work) indicates that these parallels are more than coincidences. We are prompted to look more closely at the writer linking these two texts, Eusebius of Caesarea.

III. Eusebius: A literary historian?

It is worth pausing here and looking briefly at the state of scholarship on Eusebius' craft as a writer. Modern scholars have typically offered a low valuation of Eusebius' literary sophistication.[17] Foakes-Jackson's judgement is typical: 'Though here and there he indulges in rather turgid rhetoric he has no eye, either for historic effect, or for picturesque description.'[18] There have however been occasional voices advising against a simplistic reading of Eusebius and even urging a greater appreciation of his narrative abilities. Eduard Schwartz, for example, thought that Eusebius' picture of Origen in Book VI was warped by strong apologetic concerns.[19] Recent scholars of ancient biography in particular have affirmed this judgement. Simon Swain, at the start of his and Mark Edwards' collection of essays on ancient biography, notes that 'Eusebius' portrait of Origen … is not *about* Origen, but uses him to present to us the history and doctrine of the Church through the times he lived in and the events he experienced (as these are seen by Eusebius in his time)'.[20]

Doron Mendels' 1999 study *The Media Revolution of Christianity*, though its conclusions can be questioned, highlighted the care Eusebius took in constructing

[17] This perhaps stems from Photius' dismissal of Eusebius in the ninth century: 'His style is neither agreeable nor brilliant, but he was a man of great learning' (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 13, trans. from René Henry, *Photius. Bibliothèque* [Paris, 1959], 11).

[18] Frederick Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili* (Cambridge, 1933), 73.

[19] Eduard Schwartz, *Eusebius: Die Kirchengeschichte*, GCS 9, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1909).

[20] Simon Swain, 'Biography and Biographic in the Literature of the Roman Empire', in Mark Edwards and Simon Swain (eds), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997), 18. See also Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1983) for an excellent account of Eusebius' discussion of biographical writing in the *Against Hierocles*, and demonstration of how Eusebius puts his own principles to work in the early sections of Book VI of the *Ecclesiastical History*.

his narrative and his awareness of his audience.[21] Erica Carotenuto went further in demonstrating how Eusebius fabricated a story about five Egyptians in chapter 11 of *The Martyrs of Palestine* using material and motifs taken from elsewhere (both from his own writings and those of his intellectual forebear Origen).[22] Joseph Verheyden does not go quite so far in his own survey article on *The Martyrs of Palestine*, but still highlights the rhetorical aspects of that text.[23] Recently, Marie Verdoner's *Narrated Reality*: *The* Historia ecclesiastica *of Eusebius of Caesarea* has applied the principles of narratology to Eusebius' writing to afford it attention as text, rather than simply as a more or less reliable historical document. She reads with a particular 'sensitivity towards the unsaid, the implicit, or even the repressed'.[24] Eusebius' stories about Origen in Book 6 have been a particularly fruitful site in breeding an appreciation of Eusebius' literary skills. Christoph Markschies was recently prompted to suggest that 'in Zuchunft noch viel genauer auf die literarischen und rhetorischen Formen der Präsentation dieses Materials geachtet werden muss'.[25] Modern scholars have thus shown a growing appreciation of Eusebius' considerable skill in composition, and of his willingness to compose or edit material in order to make a particular point for his audience.[26]

[21] Doron Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius's* Ecclesiastical History (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK, 1999). Mendels' own view is that Eusebius manipulates his material in the pursuit of greater publicity and interest for a sympathetic pagan audience. There are a number of reasons for questioning this suggestion, but these are not pertinent to the present discussion.

[22] Erica Carotenuto, 'Five Egyptians Coming from Jerusalem; Some Remarks on Eusebius, "De martyribus palestinae" 11.6-13', *The Classical Quarterly* 52 (2002), 500-6.

[23] Joseph Verheyden, 'Pain and Glory: Some Introductory Comments on the Rhetorical Qualities and Potential of the *Martyrs of Palestine* by Eusebius of Caesarea', in Johan Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 241 (Leuven, 2010), 353-91.

[24] Marie Verdoner, *Narrated Reality: The* Historia ecclesiastica *of Eusebius of Caesarea*, Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity IX (Frankfurt am Main a.o., 2011), 22. See also Elizabeth Penland, 'Eusebius Philosophicus?', in Sabrina Inowlocki and Claudio Zamagni (eds), *Reconsidering Eusebius* (Leiden, 2011), 87-98; Lorenzo Perrone, 'Eusèbe de Césarée face à l'essor de la littérature chrétienne', *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 11 (2007), 311-34; and J. Corke-Webster, 'Author and Authority' (2012).

[25] Ch. Markschies, 'Eusebius als Schriftsteller. Beobachtungen zum sechsten Buch der Kirchengeschichte', in Adele Monaci Castagno (ed.), *La biografia di origene fra storia e agiografia. Atti del VI Convegno di Studi del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina*. Biblioteca di Adamantius 1 (Villa Verucchio, 2004), 50[7]. See too the other essays in this volume. Other recent work on Eusebius' craft in the "Life of Origen" includes Thomas Ferguson, *The Past is Prologue: The Revolution of Nicene Historiography*, Vigiliae Christianae Supplements 75 (Leiden, 2005); Joseph Verheyden, 'Origen in the Making: Reading between (and behind) the Lines of Eusebius' "Life of Origen" (*HE* 6)', in Sylwia Kaczmarek and Henryk Pietras (eds), *Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer* (Leuven, Paris and Walpole, MA, 2011), 713-25.

[26] This increasing appreciation of Eusebius' sophistication as a writer has gone hand in hand with a desire to discourage a narrow focus on only the *Ecclesiastical History* among Eusebius'

If we allow with these more recent studies that Eusebius is to be credited with significant narrative creativity, we must return to the literary parallels in the Lyons and Caesarean martyrdom stories with a fresh set of questions. It becomes reasonable to suppose that Eusebius has composed or edited one set of stories with the others in mind. Unfortunately, it is impossible to definitively ascribe dependency either way. The standard wisdom would suggest that Eusebius' own compositions in *The Martyrs of Palestine* have been influenced, consciously or sub-consciously, by his prior reading of the far earlier, and independently authored, *The Martyrs of Lyons*. Most scholars have accepted the authenticity of the latter document, as being authored in the west soon after the martyrdoms of 177, perhaps by Irenaeus, the future bishop of the Lyons community. It is also usually assumed that by the summer of 313, before the composition of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius had assembled his *Collection of Ancient Martyrdoms*, a group of martyr narratives from the first three centuries of Christianity to which Eusebius occasionally refers in his *Ecclesiastical History* (*e.g. EH* V 15.47; V pr. 2; V 4.3; V 21.4), and which is thought to have included the Lyons letter.[27] Most would accept then that the Lyons narrative gained its current form in the second century, and that Eusebius had read it before he came to write his own account of events in Palestine.

This likely dependency of *The Martyrs of Palestine* on *The Martyrs of Lyons* is not however entirely ironclad. Here is not the place for a detailed assessment of dating and origins, but one or two points are pertinent. Firstly, there are a number of difficulties with *The Martyrs of Lyons* as it stands. Though the second century dating of the Lyons account is generally accepted, problems remain. In 1912 the distinguished mediaeval scholar James Thompson proposed that the text was actually written roughly a century later.[28] Thompson was

extended corpus. Most important here are Michael Hollerich, *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999); Jörg Ulrich, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden. Studien zur Rolle der Juden in der Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea,* PTS 49 (Berlin, 1999); Aryeh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea against Paganism. Jewish and Christian*. Perspectives Series, Vol. III (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 2000); Aaron Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius'* Praeparatio Evangelica (Oxford, 2006); Sabrina Inowlocki, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors: His Citation Technique in an Apologetic Context* (Leiden, 2006); S. Inowlocki and C. Zamagni, *Reconsidering Eusebius* (2011).

[27] See *e.g.* A. Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius* (2003), 38; Robert M. Grant, 'Eusebius and the Martyrs of Gaul', in R. Turcon and J. Rouge (eds), *Les Martyrs de Lyon (177)* (1978), 129-36.

[28] 'To sum up: The utter silence of all historians, whether pagan or Christian, as to the persecution of Lyons before Eusebius; the absence of any tradition of this nature before the Latin translation of Eusebius was known in the West; the extrinsic evidence against the probability of there having been any Christian community in Lyons before the middle of the third century; the flagrant violation of Roman law alleged of the governor in a century when the imperial administration was at its best; the singular anomalies and anachronisms of the process – if the persecution actually took place in the second century – the internal psychological evidence – all these point to a later and probably a third-century origin of the account', James W. Thompson, 'The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177', *The American Journal of Theology* 16 (1913), 359-84, 379-80.

immediately criticised by two prominent scholars of the day, Adolf Harnack and Paul Allard.[29] Thompson responded, pointing out that these critiques failed to adequately answer all his questions.[30] Thompson remains a relatively lone voice, but the issue persists.[31] Herbert Musurillo, for example, in his standard 1972 edition of the pre-Constantinian martyr *acta*, dismisses Thompson out of hand ('there is no solid reason for accepting the ingenious theory of J.W. Thompson'), but then independently accepts the viability of a thesis closely related to Thompson's ('However authentic the letter substantially is, this does not exclude the possibility of an editor who may have substantially reworked a primitive document some time in the third century').[32] Winrich Löhr too discusses the possibility of an edited account. He is particularly troubled by a story concerning one Alcibiades, which is tacked on to the account of the martyrs in the *Ecclesiastical History*, ostensibly excerpted and quoted by Eusebius from elsewhere in the original letter. Löhr concludes that this anecdote, with its specifically anti-Montanist agenda, indicates to us that the letter as we read it in Eusebius has undergone significant editing.[33] For numerous reasons then the extant form of *The Martyrs of Lyons* is problematic.

In many ways, I suggest, Thompson's voice still rings out almost exactly a century on, concerned that 'the weight of Eusebius' mere authority and his great reputation for learning, backed by inert tradition, have for centuries borne down criticism and led to a too uncritical acceptance of him'.[34] It is noteworthy that Thompson placed foremost among the problems of the Lyons letter the bizarre and apparently illegal behaviour of the Roman governor.[35] Such irrational judicial behaviour from Roman officials is, as I noted above, entirely characteristic of Eusebius' own martyr narratives.[36] It is not inconceivable then

[29] Adolf Harnack, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 3 (1913), 74-6 and Paul Allard, 'Une nouvelle théorie sur le martyre des chrétiens de Lyons, *Revue des questions historiques* (1913), 53-67.

[30] James W. Thompson, 'The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177: A Reply to Certain Criticisms', *The American Journal of Theology* 17 (1913), 249-58; Allard did respond again in Paul Allard, 'Encore la lettre sur les martyrs Lyonnais de 177', *RQuestHist* 95 (1914), 83-9.

[31] See the dismissal of Thompson in, for example, Paul Keresztes, 'The Massacre at Lugdunum in 177 A.D.', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 16 (1967), 75-86.

[32] Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972), xx-xxi.

[33] Winrich A. Löhr, 'Der Brief der Gemeinden von Lyon und Vienne', in Damaskinos Papandreou, Wolfgang A. Bienert and Knut Schäferdiek (eds), *Oecumenica et patristica: Festschrift für Wilhelm Schneemelcher zum 75. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 1989), 135-45. C.R. Moss, *The Other Christs* (2010), 189 and *Ancient Christian Martyrdom* (2012), 104-6, also allow for the possibility of third century or Eusebian editing.

[34] J.W. Thompson, 'A Reply to Certain Criticisms' (1913), 249-50.

[35] J.W. Thompson, 'A Reply to Certain Criticisms' (1913), 252. Even William Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church. A Study of Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford, 1965), 24-5 [n. 47] admits this point.

[36] See J. Corke-Webster, 'Author and Authority' (2012).

that the phenomena I identified in *The Martyrs of Lyons* actually stem from Eusebian editing.

Secondly, it is worth remembering that according to the standard dating of Burgess *et al*., the long recension of *The Martyrs of Palestine* was written before the *Ecclesiastical History*, and potentially before *The Collection of Ancient Martyrdoms* was assembled. Eusebius produced his narrative history, which included the account of the martyrs in Lyons, after he had written the stories about Agapius, Apphianus and the other Palestinian martyrs. It is thus at least possible chronologically that Eusebius transmitted and edited *The Martyrs of Lyons* in the light of *The Martyrs of Palestine*, either when it was part of *The Collection of Ancient Martyrdoms* or the *Ecclesiastical History*.

The literary parallels observed in these two accounts above could thus find their original form in either text or in neither. Scholars should therefore be cautious of how they use these texts for historical purposes.[37] In previous scholarship both have been taken as largely accurate records, and used as the basis for reconstructed pictures of the early church and its 'persecution'.[38] But this article provides further evidence that Eusebius' compositional skills must be taken seriously, and that narratives written by him or preserved within his narrative works must be read with an eye for such literary motifs. This is certainly not to say either that Eusebius was a forger, or that his works cannot be used for historical purposes (our picture of early Christianity would be barren indeed without Eusebius' writings). It is rather to add more depth to our appreciation of this remarkable writer, and to advise against over-simplified historical reconstructions based on Eusebius which do not take into account the subtleties of his presentation. And beyond these questions of accuracy and authenticity, we can use these similarities to inquire about Eusebius' motivations more generally in recording martyrdoms.

IV. Eusebius, *The Martyrs of Lyons* and *The Martyrs of Palestine* re-evaluated

Since we have established that Eusebius likely did edit one set of stories using elements of the other, the next logical question to ask is why he did so. We do not need to know the direction of dependence to begin suggesting answers. Less significant than whether Eusebius portrayed martyrs contemporary with

[37] This is in line with Winrich Löhr's conclusion that, 'aufgrund der unsicheren Datierung der Quelle sowie der fiktiven Elemente in ihrer Darstellung der Verfolgung ist das ursprüngliche Schreiben nur mit Vorbehalt als Quelle zu einer Geschichte der Christenverfolgungen im römischen Reich brauchbar. Keinesfalls darf man es als einen naiven, "hautnahen", dicht am Geschehen klebenden Bericht der Verfolgung lesen.' W. Löhr, 'Der Brief der Gemeinden von Lyon und Vienne' (1989), 144.

[38] See *e.g*. William Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965), 1-30 and 505-9; T. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 148-63.

himself as similar to those from a far off place and time, or vice versa, is the fact that Eusebius himself envisaged the two in terms of each other. This is not insignificant, and tells us much about how we should be reading Eusebian martyrdom stories. This continuity is characteristically Eusebian. Walter Bauer made precisely this point regarding the issue of orthodoxy in the Christian church. He argued that Eusebius' 'ecclesiastical colouring'[39] – his desire for the early church always to have looked like the monolithic institution of his own day – had erased from the historical record the variety of early Christianities. Bauer's insight is relevant to our own study. The similar terms in which Eusebius' narratives describes martyrs of the second and fourth centuries is, I suggest, dictated by this concern for continuity.[40]

In the introduction to his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius states in the same breath that he will treat both historical martyrdoms and contemporary ones: '… the noble men who as occasion offered endured death and torture in the conflict on its behalf [the divine word's], the martyrdoms, after these things, that took place in our day also … these it is my purpose to commit to writing …' (καὶ πηλίκοι κατὰ καιροὺς τὸν δι' αἵματος καὶ βασάνων ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ διεξῆλθον ἀγῶνα, τάτ' ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ καθ' ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς μαρτύρια …γραφῇ παραδοῦναι προῃρημένος…, *EH* I 1.2). This article has demonstrated how the two can be concretely linked for Eusebius. There is room for much further work here on what exactly Eusebius draws out from the history of martyrdom and persecution. I suggest that in the timeless "type" of the martyr he finds opportunity to consistently paint portraits of those behavioural values he sees as characteristic of the Christian church in the past, and which he believes will be most useful to its future.[41] I mentioned briefly above that one recurring similarity between the Lyons and Palestine narratives is the contrast between the violent, angry behaviour of the Roman officials and the mutual encouragement, prayer and support of the Christian victims. It is this community support, I suggest, which Eusebius wishes to present as characteristic of the Christian congregation throughout its history, and for which the martyrs prove such apposite exemplars, regardless of dating or geography.

[39] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (London, 1934 [repr. 1964]), 4.

[40] This is hinted at by Barnes too; see *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 142 and 162.

[41] See Robert Grant on the martyrs in Lyons: 'What the account of the martyrs will reveal is the nature of Christian life as supremely expressed by the martyrs themselves', in R. Grant, 'Eusebius and the Martyrs of Gaul' (1978), 133.

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